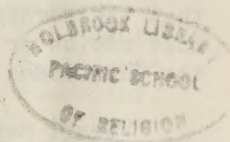


Japan Christian Activity News

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EXPLO '74: PERSONAL, ANTI-COMMUNIST SALVATION

by Jessica Alexander

Editor's Note: The following special report from Seoul, south Korea, was written by a British journalist who happened upon EXPLO '74 during her mid-August visit. Since she was largely unaware of the swirling international controversy that preceded the fundamentalist extravaganza, we think her fresh observations are especially enlightening.

The first sight that meets your eyes when you leave Kimpo Airport is a huge sign saying "Welcome to EXPLO '74".

EXPLO '74 is a mammoth religious happening centering on a week of preaching, praying and celebrating which took place August 13-18 on an outdoor exhibition ground in the Han River Delta. It is a follow-up to a highly successful revival crusade led by Billy Graham in 1973. The object, according to the glossy brochure produced for the participants, is to make Korea the "first Christian country in Asia".

For the government of south Korea, EXPLO '74 is a godsend in every sense of the word. It emphasizes the individualistic side of Christianity, the importance of personal salvation and the menace of communism. The EXPLO brochure has glowing photographs of sunset over Korean mountains and skyscrapers in central Seoul. It begins by telling the story of the Rev. Kim Jun Kong, the originator of EXPLO '74. Kim lived in the north and saw his family killed by the Communists. This triggered off his own conversion, and he fled to the South with a mission to preach to students and prevent the spread of communism on the campuses. This is precisely the sort of thing that the ROK Government wants people to read. It revives the old horrors of communism and gives credence to the need for special, repressive "Emergency Measures".

On the outskirts of Seoul, in the final days of preparation, armed soldiers kept an eye on the site of EXPLO '74. A dark limousine brought in the Rev. Billy Bright, organizer of Campus Crusade for Christ, the movement behind EXPLO. The Korean headquarters of CCC is a vast modern building erected on land which was scheduled for redevelopment by Seoul city. The handbook tells us that permission to build the center came as an "answer to prayer".

It would be wrong to suggest that the participants in EXPLO '74 are aware that they are helping the government by taking the social and political sting out of religion. Most of them are lively and sincere youngsters from all parts of Korea, Asian, the U.S., Europe and Africa. The organizers estimate that some sixty countries sent delegates to EXPLO. More than one million people participated in the various EXPLO activities.

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The sad thing is that so many genuine and enthusiastic people are the unconscious tools of President Park's dictatorship. When I visited the Campus Crusade headquarters, it was a hive of activity. There were training courses, lectures, meetings and discussions to be planned. The schedule included a speech by Park on the Republic of Korea, although the program added in brackets that this was "not part of EXPLO". With all this activity it is not surprising that the foreign participants had little time to absorb the situation in their host nation or to understand the real silent explosion which has been uniting the Christians of South Korea in opposition to the Park regime.

When I mentioned to one American CCC official that there had been some conflict between Christians and the government in South Korea, she replied, "Oh, really? I haven't heard about it." The attitude of the government to EXPLO? "They have been as cooperative as they could be."

--Another Explosion--

From the Government's point of view, EXPLO '74 has provided a magnificent cover-up for another explosion which is going on in the Korean churches, an explosion that has resulted from the neglect of social problems and the increase of oppression and torture by the government. For months, the foreign press has been full of stories about this silent explosion. We have read of services being held in crowded churches on behalf of political prisoners, clergy and laity being arrested. There was even an incident, solemnly described to the press by Premier Kim Jong Pil, in which a crowd of Catholic "thugs" beat up an unsuspecting KCIA man in the course of his duty.

The world at large reads these stories with some bewilderment. Many people realize that stories like the one repeated by Kim Jong Pil are purely fictitious. Fewer, perhaps, know that the "National Federation of Democratic Youth and Students", the alleged subversive, pro-communist body aided by students, Christians and others, is a creation of the KCIA's ever-fertile imagination. But even those who understand this feel that there can be no smoke without a fire: not even Park Chung Hee in his more paranoid moments would clap pastors and bishops in jail unless they had done something to threaten his regime.

The fire, of course, is there. The Christians, the students and the socially conscious members of Korean society do pose a threat to Park's position. But a large part of the trouble lies in a problem seldom touched on by the dramatic press reports of arrest and torture in South Korea. This problem is the gross imbalance in the distribution of wealth in the ROK.

The Republic of Korea is going through that difficult phase experienced by many countries in the course of their industrial revolution. In the past few years the Korean economy has achieved exceptionally rapid growth. The benefits have been real. Average per capita income has risen. Schooling is now compulsory up to sixth grade. The population, in the cities at least, is better dressed and better fed than it was ten years ago. These benefits help to explain the real support which the Park regime continues to enjoy amongst some sections of the population.

Unfortunately, the Government wishes to present an entirely rosy picture, and goes to great lengths to hide the squalor and misery which continues to exist under the superficial new prosperity of South Korea. The Korean boom is based to a large extent on cheap labor, which encourages overseas investment (especially from Japan) and produces cheap exports. The costs of "cheap labor" in terms of human suffering, are best illustrated by the statements of the two Korean workers we interviewed, and by the oppressive poverty which is still visible in every major Korean city.

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--The Labor Situation--

Leaving downtown Seoul, with its broad avenues and towering new hotels, following the line of the newly-completed subway, you reach the area of the sweatshops. One huge building houses some fifty shops, each consisting of a tiny room where a group of girls spend their day crowded together over sewing machines. Often as many as ten girls work in one small room with inadequate lighting and little or no air-conditioning. Some work sitting on the floor. The minimum age for factory work is fourteen, but some of the girls in the sweatshops look a very young fourteen indeed. In some places, a single-storey room has been divided horizontally to create two workshops. I saw one attic room, reached by a ladder, where six girls worked in a tiny space. It was impossible for them to stand upright in their workshop. The hours and the pay in these sweatshops are as appalling as the working conditions.

In many large factories, conditions are not much better. At one factory making dolls' clothes the girls work an 8 1/2 hour day with half an hour for lunch. The pressure of work is great, and they are usually unable to take breaks for drinking water or going to the toilet. They work a six-day week and have three days holiday a year. The monthly wage is 10,000 won (about 7,500 yen). Even allowing for the somewhat lower cost of living in Korea, this seems unthinkable by Japanese or western standards, but by Korean standards they are lucky; their wage is above average for this type of work.

On the outskirts of Seoul you can see much modern housing going up, but you have only to peer down the backstreets of any city to see truly Dickensian poverty. Indeed, I heard of one English teacher in Seoul who takes her students of Dickens on field-trips round their own city. As in all rapidly industrializing nations, the rural poor have flocked to the cities, creating a pool of cheap labor and a sprawl of slums. Crowds of children flock into the alleyways from one-roomed shacks without heating, drainage or running water. Many of the houses are as dark as caves. Houses are often erected illegally, sometimes along railway tracks or in other unsuitable places, only to be torn down by the police.

--The Christian Response--

This is the reverse side of Korea's economic miracle, and it is for drawing attention to these facts that many Christians and other Koreans have fallen foul of the Government. South Korea has the most excellent labour laws stipulating minimum pay and working conditions. In practice, however, these laws are inoperative. Many workers, particularly those in the small concerns, are unaware of their rights, and the Government has no interest in enforcing legislation which may have an adverse effect on those all-important GNP statistics. Bishop Chi was responsible for producing a cheap, pocket-sized edition of the labor laws in simple Korean for distribution to workers. Kim Chi Ha also studied and wrote about social conditions in South Korea. It is for these "crimes", as much as for the offences mentioned in their trials, that they are now in prison.

Other Christian groups have been involved in collecting and disseminating information on working conditions and filling the large gaps left by the state's minimal welfare provisions. In many cases it was exposure to the realities of social conditions in their own country which awakened the students' hostility to the government. But all channels of protest are muzzled. Strikes are illegal and students are sentenced even to death for such crimes as "refusal to attend classes or take examinations without legitimate cause".

This is the root of the real explosion which is taking place in south Korea. The arrest, the oppression and the cover-up activities such as EXPLO '74 have not killed the opposition, but it is becoming increasingly an underground opposition. Meanwhile the Government continues its tortuous attempts to maintain control of the situation. The use of torture in south Korean prisons is now well-known, but in fact the government has little need to extract confessions by torture. They can simply instruct the Korean press to print false "confessions" by alleged "revolutionaries". This is a technique frequently used, for example in the cases of Bishop Chi and Kim Chi Ha. Those present at the trials can easily be intimidated to keep the truth silent. This occurred in the case of Kim Chi Ha, whose family was subjected to pressures and threats in an attempt to prevent them from repeating his true statements at his trial. The government has now taken to putting arrested students on trial secretly. In the week of August 4 - 11 at least twenty students were tried and sentenced by the military court without their families or their lawyers being informed. In some cases it was only by accident that mothers discovered their sons were on trial.

-- PREACHING THE TRUTH --

At present, the pulpits of the churches are the only places where Koreans still can and do speak the truth about their country and their government, but even this channel of protest may soon be cut off. Until now, the government has restricted its repression of Christians for fear of world opinion, but there are signs that it is becoming increasingly indifferent to the opposition generated abroad.

At the same time it is likely that the government may seek to improve its image by imposing sentences on a large number of people and then granting a few amnesties to give an appearance of leniency. Thus the public is duped into believing in the government's clemency because the sentence on a wholly innocent man has been cut from capital punishment to life imprisonment or from twenty to ten years. Again, the government may release a few famous prisoners, leaving the less well-known or less powerful in jail. So it is possible that such men as Kim Chi Ha, Bishop Chi and the Presbyterian leader Park Hyong Kyu may be released. It is important that we should remember the hundreds of other Koreans imprisoned because of their desire to improve the life of their people. There has been much publicity about the plight of a few well-known men. It would be sad to forget the growing "unknown majority" of South Korea's political prisoners.

HITACHI MEETS ALL DEMANDS IN DISCRIMINATION CASE

Park Song Juk reported for work at the Hitachi Co., this week, and supporters in his three-and-a-half year anti-discrimination struggle are jubilant.

A rally on Sunday, September 1, originally planned to intensify the international boycott of Hitachi products, became a victory celebration following Hitachi's August 27 announcement that it would cease all discriminatory practices in terms of employment of Koreans in Japan.

Park was hired by Hitachi nearly four years ago but was soon dismissed when the company found out he was a Korean in Japan. The case drew worldwide attention, led by active involvement of numerous Christian groups. The Korean Christian Church in Japan spearheaded the Christian concern, aided by legal funds from the World Council of Churches' Programme to Combat Racism and by a direct expression of concern to Hitachi America, Ltd., by a delegation from the NCCC/USA in late July.

The Park-Hitachi case began coming to a head in May of this year while a ruling was awaited from the Yokohama District Court. Anticipating a pro-Park decision, Hitachi offered to reinstate Park and pay his back wages. Hitachi refused, however, to guarantee that it would stop employment discrimination based on nationality. On June 19 the court handed down its decision against Hitachi, but Hitachi still refused to budge in terms of the larger issues involved. With the growing threat of the international boycott, made credible by the NCCC/USA expression of concern, the company finally granted all the demands.

The August 27 agreement assures that in the future Hitachi will select employers "based on ability, aptitude for work and willingness, without discrimination on the basis of nationality." A family register (which Park lacked, leading to Hitachi's discovery that he wasn't Japanese) will no longer be required.

Furthermore, Hitachi will institute an educational and training program within the company to ease relations between Japanese and non-Japanese employees. This program will include "detailed information on the background and issues of the Park case" according to an August 19 letter from K. Mouri, Corporate Secretary for Hitachi in New York, to Robert W. Northup, Secretary of the Japan-North American Commission on Cooperative Mission.

Hitachi's commitment to open employment practices and the internal education program are seen as landmarks in the struggle against discriminatory hiring by Japanese companies. In the past not only non-Japanese but also Japanese of particular political, cultural or religious backgrounds have been denied positions in most major companies.

The Japanese family register, an official record often several hundred years long, has made it possible for prospective employers to quietly screen out applicants with "undesirable" backgrounds. The Park case was unusual in that Park was employed under his Japanese name (assumed by his family before World War II when Koreans were forced by Japan to speak Japanese and use Japanese names). When the company later asked for the family register, and Park didn't have one, Hitachi terminated his employment. The company's official position was that Park had deceived the company by applying for work under his Japanese name. The court disagreed.

Park was officially re-hired on September 2. He is presently taking part in Hitachi's three-month training course in computer programming. November he is expected to work as a computer programmer.

Dr. Lee In Ha, Moderator of the Korean Christian Church in Japan and a leader in the struggle, gives special credit to Dr. W. Sterling Cary, President of the NCCC/USA, and other members of the New York delegation which visited Hitachi, for speeding Hitachi's capitulation. "This seems to me the kind of mission the Church can successfully undertake in the world today," says Dr. Lee.

He also feels that the long road to victory for Park has had immense value in terms of political education for social change among all residents of Japan. "We have learned that social justice simply will not evolve from church statements and resolutions. Just as the problems of today's world are concrete and not theoretical, so our Christian witness must be concrete. We could have pleaded with Hitachi for years about justice and morality, and they would have simply ignored us. But with a strong international movement expressing concern backed by a threat to Hitachi's pocketbook--the international boycott--we have seen how Christian love and concern can move mountains. Now we must wrestle with other problems of discrimination, and we ask your prayerful support," he said.

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-- Christians Discuss Buddhism --

About sixty clergy and lay Christians, Catholic and Protestant, sat for hours of discussion with some thirty laymen of Jodoshu Sect of Buddhism at Chion-in Temple in Kyoto September 5. It was part of the annual three day seminar sponsored by the NCC Center of Study of Japanese Religions. Among the historically established Buddhist sects, the Christian participants found out, Jodoshu is most concerned with lay activities. The people whom the Christians met were lay leaders coming from all over Japan for a series of leadership training sessions in what they call the Otetsugi (hand-in-hand) movement. Unlike its cognate sect, Jodoshinshu, Jodoshu puts more emphasis on the practical aspects of members' faith, such as reciting of sutras and attendance at religious practices. The sect recognizes the need for social action. However, the Ven. Ryugen Ukai, General Secretary of Chion-in Temple---who in 1971 threatened the World Conference of Religion and Peace held in Kyoto by walking out when the Conference approved a strong statement on social issues---stated that Jodoshu is at the moment too concerned with the enrichment of faith in individual persons to build up any set of social ethics. Studies on contemporary Japanese religions from the Christian standpoint can be obtained by reading the quarterly "Japanese Religions" published by the Center, c/o Kyoto Diocese of the Japan Episcopal Church, Karasuma-Shimotachiuri, Kamikyo-ku, Kyoto 602.

MISCELLANEOUS NEWS

Baptist Union Holds Annual Convention

The Japan Baptist Union took a long step into its second century with the adoption of a "New Ten-Year Basic Evangelism Plan" at their 17th annual convention held August 27-29 in Yugawara. "Advance in Mission" was the theme under which the largest number of delegates in recent years met to hear reports and adopt plans and programs. Especially significant was the active participation of a large group of lay leaders. Youth were conspicuously absent. Their absence was a cause for concern, and new efforts will be made to re-establish a ministry to youth.

One new preaching place was admitted. Baptisms have increased 50 per cent over the previous year while assistance from American churches has decreased to 33 per cent of the regular budget according to the long-range self-support plan. Considerable time was spent approving a new accounting and auditing system for the Union.

A new Executive Committee was chosen and Rev. Hideo Nagamine was re-elected chairman. The Japan Baptist Union Overseas Medical Mission Society held its annual meeting during the convention. Although it has no missionary overseas at present, giving remains generous and over one million yen worth of medical equipment was supplied to the Baptist Union in West Bengal, India during the year.

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The Preparation Committee for the Kyodan's 18th General Assembly listened intently for three days, Sept. 2-4, to voices representing two sides of the issues stalling the Tokyo and Osaka districts, then decided that the time is not yet ripe for setting the date and place of the 18th General Assembly, which, on the normal biennial schedule, would be held in the fall of 1974. It decided to meet again Oct. 14-15 to see what progress has been made in the two districts and reconsider the matter of a specific time and place. The hopes of the Preparation Committee hang on plans for a series of issue-oriented meetings in the Osaka district, which would provide a forum for the airing of various points of view, and on the efforts of sub-district chairmen of the Tokyo district to bring about a meeting between district executive committee, those critical of them (the "problem posers") and sub-district chairmen as a first step toward convening an Assembly.

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